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UNCLAS ROME 000568

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DRL, IO, EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL BM IT HUMAN RIGHTS

SUBJECT: BURMESE HUMAN RIGHTS TO BE SUBJECT OF CONFERENCE  
HOSTED BY ITALY

REF: ROME 243 (NOTAL)

1. MFA UNDER SECRETARY FOR ASIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
MARGHERITA BONIVER PUBLISHED AN OP-ED IN THE LOCAL JOURNAL  
L'OPINIONE FEBRUARY 6 STATING THAT THE GOI INTENDS TO HOST A  
CONFERENCE ON BURMESE HUMAN RIGHTS IN CONJUNCTION WITH ITS EU  
PRESIDENCY, WHICH RUNS FROM JULY TO DECEMBER 2003. IT IS  
UNCLEAR IF THIS IDEA IS AN ELABORATION OF THE CONFERENCE  
PROPOSED REFTEL TO BRING TOGETHER MUSLIM AND WESTERN  
COUNTRIES ON THE BASIS OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS.

2. FOLLOWING IS AN INFORMAL TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT OF  
BONIVER'S ARTICLE.

BEGIN TEXT. WHEN IT COMES TO FOREIGN POLICY, EUROPE OFTEN  
ENCOUNTERS MANY OBSTACLES IN FORGING A STANCE SHARED BY ALL  
OF ITS MEMBERS. RIGHT NOW, IRAQ PROVIDES A DRAMATIC EXAMPLE.  
FORTUNATELY, THIS IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE. ON BURMA, FOR  
EXAMPLE, THERE IS A COMMON POSITION. THE PRESS BLACKOUT  
IMPOSED BY THE MILITARY REGIME THAT RULES MYANMAR HAS CREATED  
A THICK MEDIA FOG OVER ITS INSUFFICIENT RESPECT FOR THE MOST  
BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND ITS VIOLENCE AGAINST THE OPPOSITION.  
DESPITE BOTH GEOGRAPHIC DISTANCE AND WIDESPREAD SILENCE, THE  
UNION HAS BEEN ABLE TO EXPRESS A FIRM CONDEMNATION  
ACCOMPANIED BY STRICT POLITICAL SANCTIONS THAT AT THE  
INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, COMPLETELY ISOLATED THE MILITARY JUNTA,  
WHICH HAS BEEN IN POWER FOR MANY YEARS. AS A MATTER OF FACT,  
IN 1999 (NOTE: APPEARS TO BE AN ERROR; SHOULD READ 1990 END  
NOTE) FREE ELECTIONS TOOK PLACE, RESULTING IN THE VICTORY OF  
THE NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF  
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATE MRS. AUNG SAN SUU KYI. THE  
ELECTORAL MANDATE WAS NEVER HONORED, AND THE BRAVE LEADER  
(JUST RECENTLY SET FREE) WAS PUT UNDER HOUSE ARREST.

AT THIS POINT, IT IS CLEAR THAT POLITICAL SANCTIONS SHOULD BE  
CONSIDERED INSUFFICIENT. INDEED, BURMESE ARE NOT ONLY  
EXPERIENCING A LACK OF FREEDOM UNDER A DESPOTIC AND CRUEL  
DICTATORSHIP, BUT ALSO TERRIBLE POVERTY, AN ECONOMY LACKING  
IN RESOURCES (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF OPIUM), AND A TREMENDOUS  
NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY AIDS.

IT IS, THEREFORE, NECESSARY TO MAKE INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC  
OPINION AWARE NOT ONLY OF THE ANCIENT ARCHITECTURAL,  
HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL TREASURES OF THE COUNTRY, BUT  
ESPECIALLY OF ITS CURRENT PROBLEMS, WHICH TOURISTS ONLY  
BARELY PERCEIVE WITH CARELESS APATHY. DURING THE RECENT  
ASEAN SUMMIT (THE RECURRING CONFERENCE BETWEEN THE EU AND THE  
TEN COUNTRIES OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA) HELD IN BRUSSELS A FEW DAYS  
AGO, ITALY, WHICH I REPRESENTED, RAISED THE BURMA ISSUE BY  
POINTING TO THE FACT THAT THE POSITION THUS FAR MAINTAINED BY  
THE 15 MEMBERS, IN SPITE OF ITS FIRM DETERMINATION, HAS NOT  
PRODUCED CONCRETE RESULTS.

THE BURMESE ARE SUFFERING, ALL FREEDOMS -- EVEN THE MOST  
BASIC ONES -- CONTINUE TO BE DENIED, AND THERE IS NO REASON  
TO ANTICIPATE POSITIVE CHANGE EITHER IN THE SHORT OR MEDIUM  
TERM. IN OUR OPINION, IT IS TIME TO CHANGE TACK. WE PROPOSE  
A MORE RESOLUTE INTERVENTION AGAINST THE REGIME BY RELYING ON  
EU JOINT ACTION IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH UN SPECIAL  
REPRESENTATIVE FOR BURMA RAZALI. THEREFORE, IT IS OUR  
INTENTION TO USE THE PLATFORM OF THE ITALIAN EU PRESIDENCY  
DURING THE FORTHCOMING SEMESTER TO ORGANIZE AN INTERNATIONAL  
EVENT THAT WILL ATTRACT MEDIA ATTENTION TO THE BURMESE  
SITUATION, WHICH IS RARELY ADDRESSED.

SEPTEMBER 11 MARKED A WATERSHED AND ELICITED UNANIMOUS  
CONDEMNATION. IT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE TO IGNORE, WHETHER  
DUE TO LAZINESS OR CONVENIENCE, TERRIBLE SITUATIONS THAT WE  
KNOW COULD FOSTER TERRORISM. THE HARDSHIPS AND ISOLATION OF  
ANY COUNTRY, AT ANY LATITUDE, CAN NO LONGER BE NEGLECTED:  
NOBODY IS SAFE FROM THE THREAT OF TERRORISM.

END TEXT.  
SEMBLER

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